

but not paraffin oil ; whereupon that artful Selina said my daintiness was a perfect curse ; I had never eaten a bit of cold meat from my babyhood upwards, and I was absurd. Whereupon I said :

"Don't tell Champie I don't like cold meat," and she replied :

"Why, what, pray, have you got to do with the Champion?" and then I drew the bambina out of my pocket—by the bye, I forgot to mention the bambina ; it's a tiny guitar, made to carry in one's pocket, and take on water excursions or road excursions—and I said :

"Cut the sandwiches, Selina, dear, and Sabina and I will sing the gipsy chorus out of the *New Romanians*."

Sabina Ann never can resist singing ; she is the delight of all the "at home" people. She is to be relied on as always being what is called "in voice," and her invoices are cargoes of heartrending ditties.

So we commenced to sing. Every now and then Selina's "bass" would thunder in, rich, full, suggestive of the profound matters of life. The accompaniment was just a few chords, and the drum, roll, and nails (Spanish style affair).

### GIPSY GIRL.

(*From the "New Romanians."*)

Rejoice in the light that comes at day  
As the sun rises up, like a god at play ;  
He casts his beams in the gipsy's track,  
He guides us onward, but never back.

#### *Chorus.*

Zingara, Romany boy !  
Zingara, Romany girl !  
Sing away, dance away,  
Keep happy while you may.

## THREE WOMEN IN ONE BOAT.

Sing we all a merry song,  
So the day shall ne'er be long ;  
The light that comes at eventide  
Is sweet, and fair, and shall abide.

*Chorus.*—Zingara, &c.

Wild is the blood that flows in our veins ;  
For us great cities are full of pain ;  
We live in the breath of the wood and stream ;  
We should die if caged from the sun's glad beam.

*Chorus.*—Zingara, &c.

There is an echo just below Chertsey Bridge, a peculiarly strong one. The distant woods seem to take up the chorus, and the dying sun for one moment to linger and wonder at the mystery of human song.

"Keep happy while you may," sighed the soft, low-toned wind.

"Keep happy while you may," murmured the strong, deep current as it rushed onward.

"Keep happy while you may," repeated the weird voice of the echo.

Then did Selina suggest sandwiches, and, as she handed them, said it was not her fault that they were not "pork." That's Selina all over. Directly one gets into the realms of thought, she produces a pork sandwich !

We sat munching our sandwiches while the boat idly rocked up and down. It's my belief that we didn't fail of the picturesque, an effect easily enough attainable. Selina had her bearskin to rest against, and a wonderful cushion, imported straight from "Roma," on which to lean her head. Sabina Ann had a tiger-skin (such a striped monster !) and, as for me, I always cling to one old tartan, and had twisted it about me in true Highland style. Tintoretto sat with her sphinx-like face looking outward and onward, her strange green eyes ablaze with light ; every now and then she shook her grand silver collar and bells, as if to shake herself out of

Catland. The three bouquets, too, were conspicuous enough at the prow, and the big scarlet umbrella looked for all the world like an old pensioner who had furred his colours.

"Selina, dear," I said, as I flung my crumbs to a swan (which had come sailing majestically up, as much as to say, "I'm a queen, but, as my subjects, I claim your crumbs") "do tell us how 'Champie' won the Diamonds. You were at Henley that year; you saw it all. Do tell us."

Selina took out her sketch-book, and rather aggravatingly began to fill in a sky. (She had been sketching Chertsey Bridge.) She continued leisurely to ply her pencil. Selina takes her own way and her own time, something like the "powers that be."

"Do, Selina," I reiterated; so at last she began to speak, throwing her right hand at an angle of forty-five, and her face filling with all the fire of proud recollection.

"The dark horse wins the day, and 'Champie' is the fastest sculler that ever horsed the river; but it was not from belief in his own powers that 'Champie' has held more boating honours in his hand at one time than any other man; for a more modest fellow than my brother never championed the Thames. I've heard little sparrow scullers come twittering up to him, and talk of their little pair-oar races in puddles and ponds as if they were world-renowned oars. Such tremendous airs have they given themselves! And I have seen 'Champie' listen to them with unassumed kindly interest, till at last, my patience with these little swelling-worded boasters bursting all bounds, I've said, 'Are you aware of the giant sculler you are addressing?' And sometimes, to my amazement, they have known, and yet have ventured; and sometimes, equally to my amazement, they have not known, and yet have ventured. Henley

was 'Champie's' maiden race; he had never raced before. For two months before the race came off he and his trainer were at Henley, and all I can tell you is that he was trained just like a horse (only not with half so much consideration). The sweating process (yes, talk of sweating—that was sweating!) from six in the morning till nine at night. Walking, running, besides keeping two courses every day against the stop-watch. Still for all this there was nothing to attract much observation at Henley before the memorable day. The good folks of Henley watched the 'Kite'—a well-shaped funny that had been just launched on the northern waters—night after night, as it was seen with its solitary occupant doing the course, while 'Joe' coached from the bank. They gathered—those well-seasoned folks to aquatic exploits—about their riverside, and observed with lazy, good-humoured interest all that went on, but they little thought the winner was before them. At last the memorable day arrived, and Henley—gay Henley—was a fact. The July sun rose like a rejoicing giant in the heavens, and blazed his glances earthward. There was not a breath of air. Nature seemed to participate by being absolutely still. The river was a flower-garden, gay as Ascot. The lawn was crowded. Happy Selina (that's me) was on it. The umpire's launch is at the starting-point; the drags are crowded; the house-boats form a long terrace of beautifully-appointed houses, like the barges at Oxford, only on a larger scale. The countless crafts are being rapidly got into their places by the Thames police, so that the course may be clear.

"Henley bridge is massed with heads. Radley boys and Eton boys greet their comrades and chaff unmercifully, after their wont. The Ishmaelitish strawberry-sellers are making the air thick with their guttural voices; 'Fine strawberries! fresh strawberries!' The

niggers are on the water, and 'Bones' is having a rare time of it with fresh-made puns and humorous ditties. Scattered broadcast are bright bits of colour—flannels, gay straws, blazers distinctive of colleges, clubs, schools, light blue, dark blue, each colour as significant to boating men as the degree of a parson to a 'Varsity graduate. There's a grand display of bare legs, both in the boats and on the banks. Our boating-men are pretty free and easy, and think little of shocking the susceptibilities of the over-particular. A gun is fired; the start has taken place, but nothing is seen. In a few seconds a surging mass on foot is running along the bank. Presently you hear the great roar of a multitude of voices, hoarse, long, continuous. It increases, it becomes deafening, and you, too, become deaf to the shouts, to the cries, to the mad enthusiasm of that enthusiastic throng in your own wild desire that 'your man' may win. On comes the crowd with convulsive upheavals, moving like one, and yet all strangely at variance, each shouting lustily the name of his man. Now the three boats are visible to our straining eyes. In one is the holder of the Diamonds; in another, a well-trying man, greatly conscious of his own success in the past, and still more conscious of success to come; in the third rises the dark head and broad shoulders of 'Champie,' the then novice. As they near the bend a great shout goes up, the shout of victory. I hear the name of 'Champie' ringing in the air, caught up by thousands, and eddying on and on. He is walking over the course with long, swinging, powerful strokes; he is sweeping over the water, his cherry-coloured flag waving gaily in the nose of that racing craft. His opponents are nowhere. The gun again booms. The great race of Henley is over, and this was the beginning of the long series of triumphs for which our Champion is famous."

Selina stopped talking, and meditatively began to weigh anchor preliminary to our pulling up to Staines. "Ah," she said, as she pulled in the rope and we were dragged up to the spot to which we were anchored, "it needs a lot of endurance to win a great race. Now, then, Sabina Ann, hold on to my skirts, or I shall be over-board. If it rains Tintoretto's and Montmorencies, I hope neither of you will move from our combined intention of sleeping one night in a boat, under that old tarpaulin cover!"

---

## CHAPTER XII.

### TARPAULIN EXPERIENCES AND ETON BOYS.

THERE are some people who have always reminded me of what I believe is called "Chubb's patent lock," they are so absolutely certain of the made-up contents and well-organised plans arranged in their own safety chests; they are so convincingly proof against being broken in upon by those amiable thieves of our time known as our acquaintances, or those inner thieves known as our inclinations, both of which often upset calculations, and destroy plans of campaign. There is, I may as well say, nothing of the Chubb's patent lock about us three. A butterfly is capable of taking me clean away into Egypt; a sunless day, baited with a ton of fog, is capable of making Selina throw her enormous energies into a metaphorical waste-paper basket and literally give in, like a frost! and an underdone cutlet is capable of making Sabina Ann Pipkin's blood boil, with that peculiar boil which boils up and over and away. Under these circumstances the reproach had more than once been thrown at us that we lacked ballast, and conveyed an impression of unreality, volatile, unstable, uncertain. Whenever this happened, Selina got hold of the family

tree and talked of her great-grandmother Grace; and Sabina Ann, of course, took poor Mr. Pipkin's gouty leg as her text, and waxed hideously eloquent over the thirty years' run in one leg that had gone on in his case, and, in fact, among the whole tribe of legs from generation to generation. Rich gout (she called it) got into the family when the keys of the City were handed over to old Jocosa Pipkin in the year Anno Domini 1657, and had maintained its position ever since.

"Did you say Jocosa Pipkin?" I had inserted gently.

"Yes," replied Sabina Ann. "He had a woman's name (old Jocosa), but he was a man and a woman-hater. There was a legend about a cap being set at him, but I never heard of its going beyond the set; anyhow, it never settled. Settlements Jocosa had a holy horror of. They knighted him," continued Sabina Ann. "He was Sir Jocosa Pipkin before he died. Who ever heard of gout without a title, unless it be 'poor' gout? and pity is title enough for that."

We were very fond of talking about our relations, we three; all our faults we set down to them, and all our virtues we set down to ourselves.

"Heavens!" said Selina one day, "look at my generosity! It's true I have never been able to give in my life; I never had the chance; but wouldn't I make my banker sit up if I had! The only cheque I've ever had is a check dress. I got it because I thought it might mean 'coming events casting shadows,' &c. The check wore out, and I never crossed it with another, never!"

We enlivened our pull up to Staines with talk of all kinds. Sometimes our talk widened and deepened like the river, and it (our talk) became so navigable that we let the crafts of the old and new worlds go by. We got into the unfathomable depths of chromatic scales, the

self-same scales that Alexander blamed Aristotle (was it Aristotle?) for revealing. We waxed classic and Horatian; we sang of Helen and we boasted about that fair city, the city of Troy.

No place (if you can call it a place) like the river for talking; it loves you to talk, or to be silent, or to be gay. There is almost a sense of compassion, the sigh of a sad, yet acknowledged mastery, in the deep undercurrent which flows at the heart of the river, as it listens, and laps its gleaming idle fringes about the waiting banks; and draws the dead leaves into little eddying circles, to float out in fantastic wind-tossed combinations; and to chant, amid the whirl of waters and rush of tides, "We, too, have lived!" Sweet, sad, brown leaves, moist with the breath of the ductile soil, which loves and uses you with unerring poise.

"Nothing will induce me to put up at Staines to-night," said Selina. "I'm in the mood to row on and on, to an enchanted castle, or an enchanted garden. We have been in touch with the old life of the Greeks, and I feel too mercurial and Hellenic altogether to moor our boat at respectable Staines. Let's go on till we get beyond Windsor—to Eton. Let us look up the Eton boys, my two chummies, dear old 'Tick and Tuck,' as we call them."

"Now, I never could stand a schoolboy," said Sabina Ann; "they are so rumbustical. Aren't they horrid, Phoebe? I am always—always afraid of them. They play football with one's feelings and cricket with one's nerves, and they are given to falling in love, too."

"It is quite immaterial to Phoebe and me," said Selina, taking the immediate upper hand, "whether you can stand them or they can stand you. I'm going to pull on to Eton, and Phoebe is going to steer us there."

"That's it, is it?" said Sabina Ann. "Very well;



if I am defeated in my purpose I won't be defeated in my charity. We had better pull away in earnest."

We flashed along past Staines, and after passing through the lock we felt the elevation of the water, much as if one had mounted a hill. Here the river becomes more and more lovely; the graceful serpentine course begins again, and you wind in and out, and bend about with delightful variation. Windsor Castle towered to the left, sombre, regal, monarchical. Turreted old red-brick Eton (the nursery of our statesmen and the playground of our lords) lay down below on the right. There is a little island on the Eton side, almost in the town. We looked at it, even hooked on, and discussed thoroughly whether we would "tarpaulin" there for the night.

Sabina Ann said it was too conspicuous—she shrank from notoriety. It was all very well for Selina, who liked it. No, no! We must moor in some retired spot, well out of the way. She was so decided that neither Selina nor I liked to dispute the matter. We had learned what everybody must learn, that to yield is the most efficient weapon in the hands of the determined. Yield, and get your way! Sabina Ann said if we didn't take care we should be talked about, and she said she had a perfect horror of that. Tarpaulin is one thing, your window-blind and closed curtains and belocked door another. Selina and I were so headlong (whatever that is). She had never been talked about *yet*; and she hoped she should so map out her course across the tempestuous sea of life as to avoid the eye of the gossip and the tooth of the slanderer.

"I'm bound for Monkey Island," said Selina suddenly.

That's Selina all over! She gives in, or appears to give in, and then suddenly bursts upon you with a

"Monkey Island," and carries you a long way on to it before you can count your coppers or calculate your previous engagements.

So to Monkey Island we made our way. Got out of our boat, walked on to the island, discovered it was not swampy, appropriated it with the independent appropriating air of landlords, selected our position, knowing we were likely to be alone in our glory, and then pulled off again to the hospitable-looking Etonian boat-house, and sprang ashore to look up our topped boy.

"Jam it, my boys, while you may," said Selina in a stage whisper to me; "tart it while you can. Jam is a non-conductor, sweet, frightfully sweet, but not brilliant."

Suddenly, above the hum of voices, rose the tones of a shrill expostulation from somewhere.

"No, Marquis; not another tart. No more tick for you. I only heard from your ma this morning; she says on no account am I to supply you with tick."

"Sarah, you beast, you wretch, you old hag!" rang out a voice, in proud remonstrance. "I'll have another of those ices or I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"You shall, my sweet old Tick." Selina had flown up to the rescue, and her arm was affectionately flung round the neck of one of the most charming-looking of small boys; an exotic; in appearance, small-featured, fair, haughty. Tuck, the bosom friend of the little Marquis, was standing by silent and subdued. It was terrible to witness this disgusting collapse of those tributary rivers whose fount is jam and whose source is tick.

Sabina got hold of the arm of Tuck and escorted him to a table, which we soon loaded up with the fruits of a rapid glance round (*The Fruits of Reserge*, as an author once proudly informed me was the title of his book). The heart of the little Marquis was angry and sore;

sensitive and stung, it took us some time to bring him round. Between the bites we heard language uncomplimentary (if Parliamentary) blowing Sarah abaft. "Hag!"—munch, munch—"Beast!"—munch, munch—"Hag!"—bolt, bolt. The irate little Marquis was not only puffed up, but puffed out.

"Forgive Sarah," said Selina; "she forgot herself."

"Not she," said Tuck, who was a very fat boy, and supposed to be the best hand known with a bolster, if only he could stir the spirit of his distinguished little chum to go in for a good old skin-your-nose encounter. "I'd take her memory off her and give her back the leavings, old Marmalady!"

"I wish I could construe her into a monument of jam and hoist her into your rooms, Tickie," said Selina, "and there let you punish her by taking your degree off her somehow. Taking her by degrees—that sort of thing."

"May she never disagree with either of you two again," said Sabina Ann solemnly. "Now let's get to our boat."

Tick and Tuck were very charmed over our exploits. They listened to all we had to tell them with that delightful freshness of interest which belongs to boy-life, and when we drew off again to Monkey Island, Tick and Tuck were standing arm-in-arm, humming, "For he's a jolly good fellow." I'm certain I saw Selina push something that crackled into the hand of Tick, so I concluded the "jolly good fellow," applied to her.

I think it was Sabina who ventured the remark, as we made our boat fast: "Do either of you regret the decision to sleep in the boat?" and I think it was Selina who emphatically denied that she had ever regretted any single decision at which she had arrived, and talked about the nice discrimination of her brain and the neat response of her heart.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## MONKEY ISLAND AND THE FRYING-PAN.

"Rig up the Chinese lanterns and hand me the frying-pan."

Our boat was cosily moored, and we had affixed our lanterns, so that they presented quite a brilliant appearance. We had put up our towing-mast, and arranged a rope to go from bow to stern. On this rope we hung our lanterns. Selina said it was fairyland; and then she grew quite sentimental, and murmured something about "wands, and princes, and Cinderellas."

"Hand me the frying-pan," said Sabina Ann, quite severely, "and don't talk nonsense about princes! Did you bring the sausages, Phœbe?" (This to me.)

"The what?" I said, fixing my *pince-nez*.

"The sausages," reiterated Sabina. "I'm going to fry them."

The fire was laid on our island, and we had gathered round it. Our boat was but a few paces from us, a brilliant spot of colour on the dark mysterious waters. It was a still night. The moon had risen blood-red, and hung in trance-like dreamings over the glorious pile of massive masonry which makes Windsor Castle so truly Royal. The star-worlds were rapidly taking their accustomed or unaccustomed places (who knows? I don't) in the unfathomable spaces which form their setting. Over all above and all below there brooded that profound silence which is the fullest expression of those unutterable thoughts that confound the wisdom of man and exalt the foolishness of babes—the silence of supernatural forces.

Night is beautiful, perhaps more beautiful than day; for night bears something on her folded wings that the glad day knows not. Night brings that best pean of praise, rest, and throws the strange mantlings of her unimagined loveliness over the fierce sorrows of her storm-tossed child, our world.

"Now, Phoebe Winter, the stars are above and the frying-pan's below; will you please butter the pan while I gather a few more sticks? I have no intention of doing more than my honest share of work. Selina is doing the sentimental, and you are doing philosophy, or theosophy, or some other 'osophy. Much good it does you! Butter that frying-pan, if you please, and remember that all thought means, for the most part, 'Out of the frying-pan into the fire'!"

"How many pounds of butter do you desire me to butter the frying-pan with, Sabina Ann Pipkin?" I said stiffly. "I suppose the frying-pan is like some of our acquaintances—nothing to be done with them without pounds of butter, eh?"

"Ay, ay, ay!" said Sabina. "Now, Phoebe, you can dance round the frying-pan. Throw in the sausages—a sausage should be done with dash—it is compounded of so many nationalities, I'm told, that—that——"

"It's Cambridge," I said; "the Light Blue has it. Cambridge has turned out some excellent mathematicians, also some excellent sausages. Oxford has her mixture, but no sausages."

"Only dons," said Selina. "I had a proposal from an Oxford don, by-the-bye, but I couldn't——"

"Tell that to the sausages later on," said Sabina Ann. "Phoebe and I are too vulgarly hungry to hear about proposals. Look out, Phoebe! What's that spluttering? Look out! Hi! hi!"

"Disgusting things!" I said, as I peered into the

frying-pan; "they are bursting, I believe; cracking up all over!"

"Popping like the Oxford don," said Sabina Ann, who was laughing to suffocation. "O, Phoebe, what a nose that sausage to the left has! Don't ask me to participate in the feast, I really can't! The things are rolling up into balls! take them off the fire! Quick! quick! quick!"

Pop—burst—jump! Don't ask me where those sausages went. For all I know, they may have bloomed out into human sausages, and be walking about on "Monkey Island" to this day. All I know is that they vanished; and when we all three looked into the frying-pan there was a sound as of grease that wept and butter that apologised—nothing more. Sabina went off, and sat under a diminutive willow. She said she thought she was in duty bound to cut me—I deserved it. Thrift was evidently an unknown virtue in me. She declined to have anything further to do with the frying-pan.

"Selina's doing a cutlet," I said. "Hold up, Sabina."

"More work," said Sabina—"more spluttering, and nothing to show for it. The cutlets will go off as the sausages did, mark my words."

"Selina is an experienced hand at it," I said. "Look at her way with that frying-pan. Even utensils know whom to obey."

Selina stood over that gipsy fire for fully twenty minutes. The flames leapt up, and every now and then her face stood out like a picture in an aureole of fire. Handsome, strong, and yet oddly soft withal. There is something about an English girl in the full development of young womanhood that you will beat or match in no living or dead nation. I mean the girl who has been brought up among horses, dogs, and sport of every kind, the life which flows away to them from fathers and

mothers who have lived on their own piece of land from generation to generation. Selina would trudge over the turned-up fields, at the side of her brother, with his gun and terriers, carrying the bag with the pink-eyed, soft-furred ferrets. She could handle them as warily as any poacher, and place them to the mouth of the hole, with its innumerable branching-out galleries and state-rooms, where "life among the rabbits" is carried on so successfully, and watch for the "bolt" of poor handicapped bunny; and see Dodger, Gripper, and Smiler's dashing onslaught, with that frank, cheery, unembarrassed smile which has been handed on to her from her hunting, shooting, boating, racing progenitors.

Nothing, somehow, looked absurd in the hands of Selina; even a frying-pan took its cue from her, and behaved itself seemly, like charity.

We gathered round at last and ate our cutlets, and vowed we had never tasted anything so perfectly cooked, and Selina told us all about the don's proposal. She said it was in Latin verses, and she had treated it as a bit of poetical license, and he had come round, she called it, to see her in a skull-cap, with glove-mittens, and absolute intentions, which she had had to put down decisively. He had been most pertinacious—said he had nothing but a housekeeper to look after him, and she had begun to rule over him—*tandem fit surculus arbor*—and that he was convinced that in matrimony, as in all things, *via trita via tuta*; and after profound consideration, and indeed many anxious and even sleepless nights, he had decided *non sibi sed patriæ*.

"Ho, ho, ho!" said Sabina, sniffing up in the air, a horrid way she certainly has when going to make game of anything. "Going to marry from patriotic sentiments! What a Spartan; Just tell us how you refused him, and then let's go to bed—I mean boat."

"In Latin, of course," said Selina. "I just wrote on a slip of paper, '*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*,' which freely rendered, as I need hardly tell you, will pass for this dog-English: 'Let not the don go beyond his book.' Now to the boat."

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### GLORIANA ON HER BARGE.

WE blew out the Chinese lanterns. We did it regretfully; it was like blowing out a row of brilliant personages. "It invariably comes to the exaltation of the useful before the beautiful," said Sabina Ann, as she arranged the wick of a riding-lamp. Then Selina and she commenced to fix up the tarpaulin quite admirably. The towing-mast figured in the middle of it, and it was buttoned over in a secretive hide-your-head style.

Neither old nor young curiosity could peer in upon us. As far as complete privacy was required, it was secured. Sabina and Selina were in positive raptures. They declared that nothing could be more perfectly charming. Sabina began to make quite an elaborate arrangement for the night. She curled her hair, for instance, with a set of frightful pins, and put on a lamb's-wool dressing-gown, and a cloak lined with Russian sable on the top of that; and on her head a warm woollen cap with a long tail, such as children wear and look picturesque enough in. She drew a pair of overalls over her feet, and flung down a mass of cushions and rugs and eiderdown quilts, and got towards the stern, and bade us a lively good-night. Selina and I had watched her in silence.

"God helps those who help themselves, I know," said Selina; "but, really, is there a pillow, or an eiderdown, or a rug left for us?"

Sabina Ann made no answer; a peculiar sound



emanated from the locality where she had located herself. Ladies don't snore, so it couldn't have been that. It must have been Tintoretto, who, rather selfishly (dear pet), had curled herself up in a ball close to Sabina, who, to my certain knowledge, hates her.

Selina now began to make her nocturnal boating arrangements—more original than Sabina's, and less "trollopy." She got into a complete bearskin costume, decidedly smart, and, as far as I could see in the forlorn light, becoming. She topped it all with a little fur cap, which she drew over her ears, and then she betook herself to the middle of the boat, and rolled herself in her fair remaining share of rugs. The bow of the boat was left to me, but I was by far too wide awake to dream of sleep. No, no! I would watch with the stars and stare about with the moon; but sleep like an ordinary mortal—not I!

Sabina Ann lifted her head up once, and looked at me and said: "It's a comfort to know we have a watchdog in Phoebe;" and Selina murmured (in her sleep, I suppose): "If anything happens give me a shake." It was my own wish, of course, to take up the position in which I found myself; but I could not help noticing how we are treated exactly as we treat ourselves. After all, I was a self-elected martyr, so they were safe in using me.

We all know how everything, to use a common expression, sounds at night in our houses: stairs creak, and furniture cracks, and a thousand noises known only to the night strike on the ear, that is doubly alive in the stillness. On the river there was only the idle lapping of the tide as it washed the banks with the ripple of the river, not with the strong under-note that marks the slightest whisper of the sea. The wind scarcely stirred the trees; now and then I could hear a slight loving shake of tree-tops, as if the wind had caught the

boughs in play, and laughed out some joyous little love-speech, as it swept over them in waves on waves. It was such a sultry night; I lifted the tarpaulin at the side nearest to me, and watched for long the startling splendours of Nature's ceaseless activity: the shadows moving ever onwards, like thoughts in swiftest chase of one another; the loving tread of those phantom feet that glide across the glistening fields, and hurry with an ever-recurring fleetness, in massive columns, over the waiting woods and the listening hills; the stars gazing downwards, and searching out the mystery of the river; and the long reed-like grasses nodding at them, with weird music and strange dream-like wavings. Now and then the hoarse croak of a frog blended with the chirrup of a grasshopper; and the dull movement of bats' wings, whirling with witch-like and fantastic flappings, born of some blind hope, linked the animate to the inanimate, and gave one a less remote feeling. A distant clock, with a note like an abbey bell, slowly, solemnly, warningly, began to chime the full time. I know nothing more strangely, sweetly sad than the deep chimes of some of our great clocks. One, two, three! I drew my sables about me. At three the night begins to creep away, with, it has often seemed to me, an accent of regret.

Imperious, masterful day is, after all, like some brilliant optimist beside the silent negatives of night. I was about to close the tarpaulin, and "do" as Sabina and Selina, when the sound of voices and the measured thud of horses' hoofs on the towing-path arrested me.

"Hold hard, Gloriana! Darn'd if I don't believe as I shall catch it about here! It was bound to go in the stream about as far as this. Hold hard, Gloriana! Darn the gall! what beast peerin' at? Don't see the corpse, do ye?"

"Hisht, Josiah! hisht!"

"Hisht! I'll 'hisht' your impudence, ungrateful hussy! As I fished ye up from being food for the fish, I'll fish ye down to be food for 'em agin, if ye don't dang up yer flamer"—*Anglice*, "tongue."

Cautiously I lifted the tarpaulin a few inches wider, and the moon, which was riding high, struck her coldest beams downwards on a barge, evidently loaded up with coals. Two figures were thrown forward in bold relief against the paling sky and the dark rushing waters: that of a powerfully-built man, who held something that looked like a long rope, with four hooks, in his hands; and that of a girl, slim and tall, with a handkerchief twisted over a tangled mass of hair. I could see that the girl was handsome. Her profile was finely worked up, but the whole expression of her personality struck me with the force of a revelation. It was conveyed in her entire bodily presence, for the light was not strong enough for me to be able to define or localise the seat of her scorn, her hatred, or her defiance. Wild, untamed, yet owing to the brute force that subjected her—as the dog cowers to the master's lash—this waif of the river rose up before me, and, like the flash of inspiration from the realms of some human *Inferno*, conveyed in an instant the hideousness of her links, wrought in the iron of repulsion and the clay of desire, to that ruthless monster, with his "drag" and his oaths.

"Hisht, Josiah! Josiah, hisht!" The *timbre* of that girl's voice is in my ears yet. High, impelling, it seemed to come from regions where, perchance, lost souls cry out to their tormentors, and bid them desist from their plaguing desire to make each sin on one common level, like prisoners who, for varying sins, are all cast headlong into one indiscriminate ward.

The thin yet perfectly outlined form of the girl was

poised over the black rotting-looking sides of the barge in an attitude of expectation, eager, silent, yet a silence alive with forces working visibly, outwardly, within her bodily presence. Her hands were flung high above her head, and then folded with an unconscious dramatic intensity, which many a celebrity in the dramatic world would have coveted. What did she see or hear beneath or upon those silent waters? Is there speech in the uninhabited body? Does the soul, clothed with its astral effulgence, hang tremulously over the scene of its shame or its agony?

"Darn you, Gloriana! Then you have tracked it, like 'em bloodhounds! I'll give you puppy-pie after this, my gal; you were worth baitin', after all. How many does that make as, taking on 'em by the gross, you've cotched me—them dead 'uns on the Surrey shore and them on this side?"

All the time the man spoke Gloriana stood as if transfixed. She was the divining-rod in his hand; she was the source of his gain and the slave of his whims; for even a bargee can have his whims, slung on his oaths, like many a master of his pack of hounds, human and canine. How thankful was I that our boat was moored, so that I could see without being seen! Not for worlds would I have missed this nether-side of life.

Now an operation commenced which froze my blood, and yet seemed to give me two senses to every one possessed before. I felt myself pass, as it were, into realistic action with Gloriana and her partner; I seemed to assist at the horrible *séance* of the dead now held between them.

Something rose, then sank, like a dead weight. The great muscled arm of the man holding that gruesome rope was prodding the waters. Gloriana had withdrawn to the rough seat slung across the coals. She sat high

on her throne, and looked down with scorn, loathing, triumph, and some inner consciousness yet underlying these grosser passions. A creature formed (I felt it) for good and noble ends, yet caught by the cruel hooks affixed to the dead-weight ropes of no opportunity.

She was facing me now. The march of clouds overhead formed a superb background. Given ease of circumstance; given the chances open to any ordinary-going girl—here was a face and a form which, even in its immaturity, might have vied with those old-world beauties that were the boast and the toast of England when Gainsborough painted his beautiful Duchess. Gloriana on her barge was a queen of beauty in a sea of foregone conclusions. The man went on with his prodding. Gloriana had given him the clue, and evidently she was never wrong in her divinations. As he prodded he swore with (paradoxical as it sounds) an almost religious fervour. The *répertoire* was not brilliant; the same ground was traversed to and fro. Few in number are the words of the common people; but for virile force those oaths might have leapt from the mouth of some great Inferno Diavolo, and certainly convinced one that, as a fusee lights a cigar, so an oath lights a man's spiritual destination.

Poised on her coal heap, the girl listened with level-knitted brows, and dark broodings which might break away into a very genius of frenzy.

At last the man was silent; the oaths ceased; he was dragging up "something" which clutched, stark, stiff, rigid, at those terrible hooks. He was hoisting up a dead body! I saw him raise his hand warningly to the girl, then beckon. She appeared not to notice, but looked out towards the east, as if it held some day-star. He beckoned again. The man was smiling; yes, I could see contortions and muscular skin-twitchings which

meant pleasure. He was clutching at the dead man's arm; he was hoisting him with the force of greed (and no force like it) into the barge. For one instant I saw the dead man's face; it was calm, with the strength of Death's one victory; it was stern, with the sternness of a destiny worked out by man's own will; it was awful, with the threefold awfulness of triune murder—body, soul, and spirit.

For one moment I cowered and shrank before this mystery of life, then redoubled my eager observation. The man was, or had been, or is, evidently (ah, the complications that beset us when we would give the dead the honour due unto their names!) a gentleman. He was well dressed. Josiah had not smiled for nothing. Now commenced a disgusting operation. Josiah began to rifle the body. He took the nerveless hand and pulled rings from the stiffened fingers; tore them off, and paused for one hideous moment to leer at Gloriana, and even offered to put them on her "darn'd knuckles," as he called her hand. He examined the dead man's pockets, turned them inside out, and took various sums off him: gold, silver, and coppers (the coppers he flung into Gloriana's lap with another leer). She neither regarded them, nor him, nor the dead man; her work was over (discovering by divination). He took his papers and folded them into a red handkerchief (one of those gaudy things beloved of the bargee genus), and thrust them into his rough blue jersey. Then his task seemed done. He began to whistle; he turned the dead man over, so that he lay face upward; and he stood over him for full a minute staring—whether with a view to possible future complications, I can't tell.

"Here, Gloriana," he said after this silent investigation, "come and kiss him; he's a darn'd aristocrat, and yer like 'em. Yer kiss him; I ain't jealous on 'em, dead

or alive. I'm going to weight him in a jiffy. Look alive! He won't rise no more, if Josiah can help to lay he."

To my surprise, Gloriana left her seat; she moved easily across the barge with the ease born of proportion—her head held high, too, as if accustomed to carrying water-pots (no pose of head better taught)—and she stooped down and kissed the dead man with the tenderness of a mother. She passed her hand across the dank hair, and she closed, or endeavoured to close, those staring eyes. She bent over him and examined each feature with a scrutiny full of unutterable sadness; then she turned away without a word, and once more took her seat, and sank into her trance-like meditations, looking always eastward. Josiah laughed. How he laughed! Hoarse, gibing, continuous, guttural—the chuckle of devilment worked into the half-intelligence and whole-cunning of demi-semi-man.

Then he lugged two great lead weights from the back of the barge; he secured them to the dead man's feet, and let each foot fall with its own dull weight as he affixed his load. Then he seized that awful unresisting mass of silent humanity in his great brawny arms, black with coal-dust and bristling with sinewy strength, and hoisted the dead man upward with one great convulsive movement; and, with an outward throw, combined of repulsion, indifference, and desire to be rid of it, he flung it from him into the waiting omnivorous waters, which circled, and eddied, and gurgled, and then sank back into the silence of rivers and seas which wait to give up their dead.

Josiah took out a short clay pipe, struck a match and lighted it; he flung himself along a seat, and began to count his gold. The horses on the towing-path moved on with weary painstaking obedience; the barge glided onward like a black swan on the silent waters, and

Gloriana sat still and erect on her pile of coal. So they passed.

After this sleep was impossible. It was true I would not for worlds have missed the horrible spectacle I had just witnessed. I knew it to be a common enough occurrence on some parts of the river—to wit, on the Surrey shore—but near stately Windsor, close to the boy life of Eton, it was rare, strange as truth itself.

I watched for the day, as we count day, longingly. I glanced with absolute disgust at the sleeping beauties before me. How could they sleep with such superlative indifference?

The sun gradually began to rise: first the faint pink glow; then the deepening impress of the awakening flush of the sun's eternal youth; then the rolling backward of countless little red-tipped clouds; and then the mighty god, shaking off the last dream of night, and rising with the shout of victory to shower health and blessing on king and peasant, blade of grass and rounded pebble. Effulgent, glorious sun! I decided to wake those two lying in such deep indifference to all below and all above. It was six o'clock. We would pull away from these waters which held so ghastly a secret, and further up, in some retired nook, take three glorious "headers." "Selina!" I said, going up to her and shaking her violently; "the Hereditary Grand Ducal has come to breakfast. Get up and receive him at once!"

"Sabina Ann!" I said, giving her also a terrific shake; "the Calendar is on the bank opposite, and he has cut off his beard!"

"Heavens!" said Sabina. "Without consulting me! Why, he will be perfectly hideous! he's got a runaway chin!" (How had she discovered it?)



## CHAPTER XV.

THE DUCAL'S LAUNCH TURNS UP AND SELINA GOES  
QUITE MAD.

WE bathed in a charming bend of the river, almost a mile beyond Windsor. Not a creature was stirring, so we did it with delightful impunity. The sun had already warmed the stretch of water in which we disported ourselves; its slanting graceful beams had turned the bend into a lakelet of molten gold. Have you not often noticed how lovely the effect of light and shade is on the river? Here is a patch of gold set in a steel-grey frame. Selina's and my costumes were models of aquatic dress. I had brought mine from Ostend the previous year, and Selina had sincerely flattered me by copying it. Sabina's, on the contrary, was the *fin de siècle*; it was an awful arrangement, and she was so conceited about it, too; swaggered before she took her header off the boat. We had expected to crush her with our grandeur, but it was quite the other way about. She rose above that dreadful old bathing-costume, and triumphed like old Socrates, or Diogenes, in his tub (I know it was one of them; I'm indifferent which). Selina is like a duck in the water; she disappears for minutes together; comes up again; lies flat on her back, and asks you to tickle her nose with a straw! Swims out with majestic strokes, disappears suddenly, and comes up at the other end. Sabina, on the other hand, is tame, miserably tame; and looks so silly, so sickeningly silly, with her arms always waving about, and her mouth invariably full of water and trying to talk in the middle of it all—as a rule, too, about Schopenhauer, of all people; She always carries this pessimistic philosopher into the water with her (metaphorically, of course). She

takes a dip, comes up, with a streak of hair wandering across her nose, and begins :

"How cleverly Schopenhauer talked about love ! didn't he, Phoebe ? "

"The people who talk the most about it know the least, as a rule, Sabina. Schopenhauer knew nothing at all about it."

Then I swim away, pursued by Sabina, who makes an awful clutch at me, which is all very well on land, but frightening in the water, where one feels like a porcupine.

"Schopenhauer said we willed one another ; didn't he, Phoebe ? "

"I beg of you, Sabina Ann, never to mention the name of that pernicious philosopher to me again. If you have willed the Calendar, will him, beard him, marry him ; but I decline to discuss the philosophy of Schopenhauer when taking my morning tub. Make room if you please"—brandishing my arms.

Then does Sabina go up and down like a cork without a screw, a perfect idiot, and looking as if she is keeping "a bit to herself"—a way she has, and a very exasperating way too. What that "bit to herself" is, I have never found out ; it's there, I am sure of it. I have seen her smile at that "bit to herself," glance coyly at it, wander out of doors (as a rule, into the garden) with it ; occasionally retire to her bedroom with it. Ah, that "bit to herself !" Once I faced her with it.

"In Heaven's name, Sabina, what is it ? Don't look like that. Live openly, as Comte advised us all. I dare you to keep that disgusting "bit" to yourself any longer. It's no good."

Sabina then looks worse than ever. Sly Gentile, sly Montmorency ! Ah, Sabina is not the only humanised Tintoretto who keeps "a bit to herself."

We did enjoy our breakfast "considerable some" after that swim. We got out the frying-pan again and copied "George" (I think it was "George") to a T. Frizzle, frizzle, frizzle. Yes, the frying-pan has its frizzle as well as Sabina Ann. We also (I must not forget to mention) made a very elaborate toilette. We had silk jerseys of all colours with us, and as long as one's body-part looks nice one can make shift on the river with a skirt of serge very well. Selina's jersey was pale pink silk; and as her skin is a pale—very pale—saffron (Irish she calls it) and her eyes intensely dark, with heaps of light brown hair, she looked uncommonly well in it. Selina, too, has a decidedly pretty nose and a ductile mouth. I have always extremely admired her. She is, too, so perfectly unconscious of her good looks. "Law! what pretty birds 'em pay-hens are up at Norris Castle! Law! don't they think something of themselves, with their tails stuck out! But there, their feet spoils 'em!" Thus spoke a yokel the other day, and pointed a moral at all conceit. "Law! their vanity spoils 'em," may be said of many.

Breakfast over, we began to discuss what our plan for the day should be. *L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose*. We were in the full tilt of hot argument when the vibratory motion of a steam-launch came stealthily upon us, after the fashion of such creatures.

"Mashallah!" said Selina, with a rapid turn of her head; "its the Ducal—it is, really. He is standing on the deck. Who could mistake him? Look, Sabina! Look, Phoebe! he is staring through his field-glass at us! He is, really!"

Selina's excitement was considerable; she moved to the prow, where the now faded bouquets were yet laid, lank and lorn; and, seizing one of them, absolutely began to brandish it at his Highness!

"I shall not expostulate, Selina," I said, "but wait the turn of events."

"The turn of the tide you mean," said Selina, who was now as pink as dawn. "He is looking for us, of course—don't you think I know?—and he will say he is confounded to see us. Don't you think I hear him?"

"Selina, if you don't sit down and give over with that bouquet I shall faint," said Sabina; "it's so conspicuous of you. Such an undignified proceeding. Why, the man will think you are—well—well—well—as Schopenhauer says—"

"Just as I thought," said Selina, with a gratified smile; "he has stopped the launch, and is evidently coming after us. Evidently—yes, he is coming—now, Sabina, now, Phoebe; he is coming! *I came, I saw, I conquered.*"

Selina had scrambled to her seat, and had flung herself back on to her cushions with quite an imposing *ensemble*. Nobody could have believed that a moment ago she had been waving that bouquet as a little school-girl waves her handkerchief at an excursion train. There are a hundred Selinas; she is never twice the same, and her actions appear to be animated by volitions beyond her absolute control; impulsive as a child one moment, and studied as the veriest *mondaine* at another.

The launch was now alongside, and, yes, it was indeed the "Hereditary Grand Ducal" who was clutching at the side of the launch, and bowing with a succession of Germanical bobs, like commas after a series of adjectives.

"The aquatic Fräuleins! What have I done that Heaven should be so kind? It is too good to be true, and too true to be evil! Ladies, am I dreaming? The authors are always dreamers. Shake me, fair ladies, if I dream! I little thought, when I started from Sunbury late last night, I should end—"

"Ah!" said Sabina Ann, "don't say it, your Highness; please don't ever and never use such sad words." (Sabina was veiling her sarcasm under the most solicitous of tones.) Her fine black eyes were careering over the Ducal's personality. O, those eyes! I wanted him to hate Sabina; it was Selina he was attracted by; and yet with her theories, and her *camaraderies*, and her magnetisms, she was a match for Selina any day! There is Fate, blind, deaf, and dumb; there is Destiny, strong, certain, sweeping; there is Lot; the last lies in your lap, and is disposed of by the higher powers. Contend with Fate: it looks at you with eyes which are wall-blind. Fight your Destiny: it will sweep you along on its strong undercurrents, and hurl you into the weirs which are ready at hand. Wait for your Lot: it is strong as the breath of spring, sweet as the air of summer, glad as the break of day!

"I have a note-book always at hand," said the Ducal. "I shall possess myself of the wise, witty, and tender sayings of the fair lady scullers! I shall absorb them into books. We authors live to write, and, when we are weary of that, to—" he looked about for his word; perhaps it came up from the river—I certainly think I heard him say "love;" if so, it was audaciously bold. But then wooers should be bold. We women like it when it's backed up with steam-launches and titles and châteaux, and more especially—yes, more especially—when it has nothing but that everything charm!

While he talked I observed him with a more discriminating eye than previously. My description of the outward envelope was true; but I saw now that he really possessed mind, just as Selina had said, and also a certain natural spontaneity of manner which proceeded from a better source, after all, than the best of possible breeding (if that was his)—from heart! He had a gentle heart;

he was kind! It sounds so easy; but ah! is it not very difficult? The polished weapon sheathed in the best of manner, too often knows it not, and in the midst of its elegant thrusts and graceful welcomes tilts the point of its blade just here and there; and so, in the midst of your admiration, you wonder why you feel sad! No heart! No soul! A polished beast after all.

"How's the cat?" he said, looking with quite a tender little glance at Tintoretto. Even a cat has no claws when folks are in the first stages of love; when it is universal and only secretly local; and, in fine, when it is doing the agreeable all round. It gets selfish enough later on at stage two, when it fires a hateful glance at every intruder on its *deux-à-deux* and *tête-à-tête* conferences; and makes outsiders almost wonder how anybody had the audacity to bring them into the world, considering these terrible lovers take up all the rooms in the world, and make everybody else feel awkward, even apologetic, except themselves.

"Yes," said he, after a long pause, during which time I am certain he had been elaborating some plan, "that is a beautiful cat."

"She is not without style," I said; "which cannot be hazarded of every cat. Tintoretto has seen a great deal—some lions in her day and some mice in her generation!"

"Has she ever seen a Barzois?" said the Ducal suddenly.

"Hundreds," said Selina audaciously. No dog so fashionable as the Barzois. "Tintoretto has scratched many a Russian and caught many a Tartar."

"Would she deign to come and scratch my Barzois near Sonning? It would make Merlino so profoundly happy to be scratched by Tintoretto. Listen, frauleins." (He turned his head to see if his men were anywhere

near, but they were not ; one was at the helm, one at the engines, and a third in the bows.) "I am first of all an author, then a prince ! My title is to me as dross—I care nothing about it ; more, it is an elaborate bore ; do you understand me ? Let me repeat myself : my title means a succession of foundation-laying, antimacassar-blessing, functional arrangement and public derangement business which my soul abhorreth. I have fled away from it. I shall flee, year by year, still further away from it. Am I an Alcibiades that people should flock to see me lay a foundation-stone ? and defile before me with their purses, because I am—what ? Let them give their money to God, and their admiration—well, where it can be honestly accorded. Let them flock to their art galleries, and defile before the creations of genius. I have a genius for writing books, but no genius for laying foundation-stones. Do I make myself apparent to your combined intelligences ? Now, to continue, I have my estates in Germany. One in the Black Forest (ah, that Black Forest ! It was made for the sons of God, but when the sons of men come, the sons of God go) ; others in different parts ; but here in England I have acquired a river-house. It is above Sonning. There I flee from functions ; there I live the ideal life ! May I in all simplicity and fair courtesy tow your boat as far as Sonning, and introduce Tintoretto to the Barzois Merlino ? My sister lives with me, and others, many others."

The Ducal's hands were working in the same curious manner that I had previously noticed, clutching at the side of the launch. Great thinkers often show this nervous action of the hands. He was looking at all three of us, too, I declare, for each of us vowed we were equally invited.

"Which is Rhadamanthus, which is Æacus, and which

is Minos, of you three? Minos, remember, sends souls to the Isles of the Blest (feminise the gods please, for once, fair ladies.") Now did the Ducal really look at Selina; he could not look "spooky"—a queer but true enough old word, to be seen occasionally clothed realistically on the face of a learned old judge or a pompous old Bishop about to conduct to the hymeneal altar (for the third time, perhaps) some last, and perchance best, loved lady.

"Ulysses saw Minos sitting with a golden sceptre in Hades, waving souls to those Isles of the Blest," said Selina (who is always apt in quotation). "I will be Minos. Tow us" (and she slightly bowed her head at the Ducal) "where you will. We are ready."

"The immortal 'Barkis is willing,'" said Sabina, with fiendish cruelty (I'm bound to say she half whispered it, but I heard her; I can't say whether that Hereditary thing at the side of the launch did; I hope not). Go, between never come out well; even Lamb's valentines were tame, to my mind, in verse.

Again the bows, hops back, and delighted slight elevation of the hat. Again, that address to the heavens! "What have I done that they should be so kind?" And now, order upon order in German, without any of Heine's descriptive horrors introduced into the really quite soft vocals; and the rope is being affixed to the Siren. The launch is gliding outward, and we are gliding after it. O Miss Pipkin! rush away with your incubator; hatch what you can, from a chick to a plot. O Mr. Pipkin! order a curry, heated with a furnace of curry-powder, and let like cure like. O innumerable tongues of innumerable old women! get out your teapots galore, and order your muffins and crumpets with all speed. Miss this river romance we won't, not if we



miss your charity next time you come across those three audacious lady scullers !

The launch was unusually big ; it had a charming upper deck over the main saloon. The awning, too, was of costly amber silk, with curtains of rich Venetian red ; the striking combination of colour was thought-inspiring. This deck was carpeted with rugs from various Moslems. Flowers were growing in huge pots, and an author's table was conspicuously to the fore. Now that table was a contrast to everything else ; it was of rough deal, and three lead ink-pots looked like business. Thereon pens, too, of all kinds and shapes were arranged in rows. A little fat cork penholder amused me most, suggestive of corky hopes of many editions of the Hereditary books.

I anticipate, however, for we did not inspect the launch for some time after we started. No ; we were flung back in delightful ease in our boat, and just rushing along with the lovely fleetness of all water-driving that is carried on by steam. It's wonderful how easily we adapt ourselves to ease after labour. The fag at the sculls, the anxiety of steering : how had we ever accomplished them ? We reclined on our cushions with folded hands, and rushed onward without a sigh backward.

" ' He ' will ask us on board by and by," said Selina ; " he will pluck up heart of grace in the rush and tumble of a weir or the dead calm of a lock. What says Phoebe ? what says Sabina ? "

" Yes to everything, as far as I am concerned. I'm not going to wrap myself in an eternal negative. It's been ably pointed out lately by a brilliant politician that it's a losing game. We must tumble up and say ' yes ' as many times a day as we can."

" Remember," said Sabina a little sententially, " that

if 'No' shuts its door, 'Yes' never at best is permitted to so much as have a door to close. There's a medium in all things."

"Mediums are born pancakes," I said—"so flat."

His Highness sat facing us on deck, smoking an enormous cheroot stuck in an enormous amber cigar-holder.

"That's an encyclopædial head of his," said Selina, who was regarding him attentively; "he has a wide, fertile, ready mind. Imagine his prowess in following us up stream like this! I shall be very proud of him."

She looked across wickedly at Sabina, who was gazing hard into the river, as if she saw but the deep unknown beauty prefigured there. At this thrust, however, she raised her head and looked across at Selina whimsically, then burst out laughing. It was like a little crisis.

"Ah, Selina, don't snub Phoebe and me when you have a Hereditary husband—always supposing the rapid conclusions at which you never fail to arrive, and hardly ever fail to find wrong, should for once prove right."

"Clasp hands, true friends and tried," said Selina—"clasp hands."

The silent and observant figure on deck, in the midst of his grandeur, must have seen that hand-clasping, and wondered; for he got up and addressed us. Then he had the steam shut off, and at last we could hear his wish.

"Do come on board; I am so dull. Take compassion on me. I, too, have a hand-clasping mind."

"He might as well have done it at the first," said Selina meditatively.

Then we scrambled on board, ably assisted by his Highness.

"Come to the saloon," he said. "I'll have the band in a few minutes on deck."

Exclamations of admiration burst from my delighted lips when I saw the saloon. To those like myself who are passionately attracted by colour (which is melody in prose) it was furnished to perfection. Pontifically superb, the brilliant scarlet draperies sent one in imagination straight away to "Roma" and into the presence of the Pope. Soft white flowers floated like a diaphanous cloud in clusters here and there, and broke all hard lines.

"Xenia, my sister, did all this," said the Grand Duke. "I go in for deal tables and lead inkpots, as you would see in my workshop, where I create ideals. Xenia has an imperial mind. She has given me up as a pure Socialist."

After this the band began to play. It consisted of five men with stringed instruments. Melody succeeded melody; the flowers seemed to redouble their fragrance, the sun to beat down on the earth in yet greater fervency. Worn out with a sleepless night, I flung myself into an American lounge, and gave myself up to the dreamlike beauty of the scene. My eyes closed, and I confess I fell asleep. Sabina had gone on deck. Selina and the Grand Duke were in the midst of a terrific discussion on some unsolved problem of the day—I forget what. I heard the Grand Duke say to Selina, "Your friend Miss Winter is tired," and I heard Selina say "Yes," and then I heard no more for some time.

At last, however, I felt that transitory state of half-wakefulness supervening on whole sleep, and I found myself placed in an exceedingly awkward predicament. I was the third in a *tête-à-tête* which was sacred and critical. If I spoke I might be a worse bore than if I remained silent. I rapidly counted the cost of my actions, and decided to remain perfectly quiescent.

"Love is a strange factor in our being, Fräulein

Davidson, is it not? Sudden, it grips us altogether—body, soul, and spirit—or it is nothing.”

“I hardly think it is ever nothing, your Highness; it is a little plague at the least, and a whole plague at the most.”

“You speak as one versed in heart-studies; does this proceed from intuition or an intimate acquaintance with many a personal experience?”

Selina smiled (through veiled eyes I beheld her). She looked at her finely-shaped hands, which lay lightly clasped in her lap, they were heavily jewelled. Selina loves rings.

“Your Highness is somewhat personal.”

“If I am personal, believe me I am so with a good intent. I have never thought it worth while to be personal before. I am old to say that, am I not?”

“We are the best judges of our own years,” said Selina, smiling (a shade foolishly, I thought).

“Association with youth makes the old feel young. I wish I were in your century.”

“Your Highness has the advantage of two centuries of wisdom, instead of one (perhaps), and wisdom is before youth.”

Neatly put, Selina! Bravo, you! There are proposals and proposals, and it is not everybody who gets into a fluster-bluster and blurts out or creates a ready-made suit.

“Ah, but I begin to feel old! Age is a schemer. I begin to scheme.”

There is redoubled fascination sometimes in those who declare they begin to feel old, and catch the unwary on the strong current of an untrue confession. That Ducal was a true Herodian after all!

“Is not love always a schemer?” said Selina, after a long pause.

"You know, you evidently know! I am but a disciple," said he, really nervously.

I was afraid Selina was going to laugh. If she had she would certainly have stopped action; for laughter is a non-conductor to stages which may be called "last stages" in the progression of the eternal love-song. (Raillery is a douche on earnestness, anyhow.)

"At whose feet?" said Selina, and her voice deepened, it was grand! Ah! that bass voice of hers was equal to the occasion!

Silence fell. I hardly breathed. I just raised my eyelids a quarter of a tenth part of a half inch, and glanced at the pair. Selina was leaning back on the imperial-looking red damask cushions. The Grand Duke was leaning forward, looking as only he could look, spiderly, ugly, but—O, well! he was the Grand Duke, and we come down to it, or up to it, or back to it, as you will.

"Why ask?" (It was a whisper; but, fraught with feeling, it was loud as a spoken word.) Then came another pause. By this time I had become desperately uncomfortable. I wished myself back in the old boat. Gooseberries! go-betweens! O, what should I do?

But the next moment I felt at ease; for the Duke had changed from indecisive wording into a passionate torrent of tropical fervour, that carried me along on its rushing current into absolute indifference to my position. He began to pour out a sudden fire of words, heated straight from the heart (I could not doubt it!).

"You, Selina, shall be my wife! I declare it! Don't say 'Yes,' don't say 'No'—the thing is out of your reach—you have no say in it. I, Fritz, declare it. I shall marry you, and that sooner than you can dream of! I shall shatter all negatives with the stern mandate of my will. You are mine, I love you. I loved you in those

haunted apartments at Sunbury, and that from the first moment your touch drew me, like a wand, up the stairway I saw the touch embodied in the fair and noble face; I beheld the fine and stately lady who shall be my consort. Ah! I see the vistas of bliss opening before me! We two, Selina, against the problems, and the fashions, and the modes of the world. We two in odd, yet perfect, combination will rule and reign in my Principality, Selina!"

He bent forward (it's no use attempting to make a pretty scene out of it) and caught Miss Selina Davidson in a Germanical (and, as far as I must own, quite unresisting) embrace, hug, and outward manifestation of inward and, I suppose, earthly love (as there is no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven, hence all the more necessity for the best bliss of earth being appreciated here), and the contract was concluded.

I rose up, drew down my jersey, stiffened my figure, and advanced from my corner, and stood before them quite unembarrassed. (Earnestness is never embarrassing to any onlooker.)

"It is all very sudden," I said, "but it is all very real. Selina, let me kiss you." (And I kissed her.) "Your Highness, let me congratulate you. Selina is any man's wife."

"I know it," said he, "and that's why she shall be mine." (Paradoxical.)

"Now to luncheon. Where is Miss—Miss Pipkin?" I said.

"Ah, yes! Miss Pipkin. It's all a-miss till we turn you young ladies into the English Mrs. and the German Frau." The Ducality was in high good humour.

We lunched, and the band played, and now we all laughed and talked in one happy little circle. The Ducal grew epigrammatic, Sabina spoke in proverbs, Selina in

allegories, and I in puns. The sun crept downward and hung low by the margin of the river and the trees, in dress of flame, bathed by the glistening banks.

We reached Sonning about 4.30.

Selina had drawn me aside to confab. "We must return at once," she said; "we will drive out, as he wishes it, to his house, and be introduced to his sister (who, he declares, never disputes or questions his actions), and then we will just (as it is his express wish) let him steam us back." Selina glanced at the boat, which was rocking empty at the end of the tiny line, and said, "He" (it was always "he" now), "he says he shall build a glass-house for it, and keep it like a cucumber (framed)."

"Ah!" I said, "his language is framed in love, we can all see. I suppose he is anxious to 'ask papa.'"

"He says he shall 'tell papa,'" said Selina; "a distinction with a difference."

"Keep him in hand, Selina," I said; "the man's silly-conceited, I believe."

"Phoebe! how dare you!"

"O, good-bye, Selina; I see the way 'Tintoretto jumps. Good-bye!"

"What's that about the cat jumps?" said the Grand Duke. "These English proverbs amuse me; so healthy, so strong, so true."

At Sonning a *char-à-banc* with four superb strawberry-*roans* met us. If the Grand Duke had had a quarter of the style of one of the two men who sat in solemn silence behind us, he would have passed for the pomp of life translated into flesh-tints. I never saw such a high membranous vertebrate gentleman; such a worldly all-knowing nose in my life. I sat brooding and speculating why the Grand Duke should look one thing when he was the other thing, and his man look the other thing

when he was the one thing (Chinese conundrum). We flashed along the quiet roads, the golden glory of the setting sun cheering up the dusty hedges with some of its rich promises.

Nothing like four horses for getting over the ground. Selina sat somewhat silent now beside the Grand Duke, who drove and drove well, neither harassing the horses nor making them go with extraordinary steppings or prancings, but treating them, like the good, kind man he was, with consideration and forethought.

"I must send a wire to my aunt," said Sabina. "Our return to-night is unexpected."

We stopped at a rural post office, and sent a message to say we should be back at 9.30—a neat calculation made by Selina's new-made *fiancé*.

Selina sent two "tels." (by-the-bye) and I sent one. We need not say who the others were for, as everything becomes apparent in due time.

At last we entered a gate with monogram and arms. The woman at the lodge watched us up the long drive with evident interest. I saw her shade her eyes, and I saw her elevate her eyebrows. We drew up at a fine Corinthian-looking bepillared house. We were bustled up a flight of steps by the Grand Duke, and rushed through ante-rooms and up corridors and past beplushed monsters, who seemed turned to stone. At last we paused at a door, approached by another of these ante-rooms, and after one second's halt and a rapid glance at us three he opened it, and ushered us into the presence of "Xenia of the imperial mind."

She was reclining on a couch at the end of a long room literally stocked with statuary. O creators of the myths of Greece and Rome cut in the pure marble, is there anything in the world of art to equal the splendour



of the chisel? I cared nothing for Xenia in comparison with her surroundings.

"Xenia, I bring you a new sister. I am about to be married shortly. Embrace her; she is Selina."

Xenia rose slowly, indifferently, and quite unastonished from her lounge and her book. Certainly she was distinguished, with a subtle distinction which nothing but a peculiar combination of blood, culture, and intimate acquaintance with the best the world can give, produces. She was a contrast in every point to her brother, I need hardly say.

"Is it so?" she said slowly, and with, indeed, great sweetness regarding Selina. Well, Fritz, my brother, I never expected you to announce your betrothal; but, as a sudden chimera, I am too happy to find your chimera so charming. My brother, you know, is what the world calls an eccentric; but if there were many more whose eccentricities took such a beneficent, happy form as his, we might wish the world was peopled with Fritzes."

"Xenia has always spoilt me," said the Duke. "You will have to run her very close, Selina *mia*."

The *mia* did for Selina! She blushed like a cloud at sunset.

We had hardly time to do more than seize an introduction and again seat ourselves in the *char-à-banc*, and once more embark on the launch.

"Life has become a rush," said Selina to me later on. "I feel breathless; I don't think I shall be able to settle down after this. I feel—I don't know what I feel—but an inexpressible something on a river of unimagined longings."

At last we were nearing Richmond Bridge. The moon made it light as day.

"Sabina Ann," "I said, "do you see a group by the middle parapet?"

"I see a dark object hanging temptingly just between the pillars to the left, as if to bait the fish. What is *that*?"

"That," said I, "is the Pipkin leg."

"Heavens!" said Sabina, "I believe it is."

"Sabina, do you see something floating, cloudlike, outward from a manly breast, in wave on wave?"

"I do," said Sabina. "what is that?"

"*That*," said I, "is the Calendar's beard."

"O," said Sabina, "my heart is jumping madly up and down! I feel—I feel—O, the unexplained emotions that——"

"Sabina, do you see an eye which shines with a discriminating, awful, vivisecting glance at the objects standing side by side in a remote corner to the left of our launch?"

"I do. To whom does that eye belong?"

"Highly tighty, flirty flighty! Sabina, don't you know your own aunt?"

"Spare him and her," said Sabina solemnly.

"Sabina Ann!" I said, and this time I fled away to the other end of the launch and clasped my hand across my heart in a very transport of delight—and what I said, I said to the stars, not to prosy mortals. I said:

"O happy stars! If that's the Champion standing there and if ever he should care for me, with that strange unexplained love which makes for matrimony, be sure and let me be rechristened *Rowena*, not *Phœbe*, for a *Phæbe* I never was and never could be."